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SONNETS OF THE
STRIFE

By ROBERT LOVEMAN



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SONNETS *of* THE STRIFE

WITH SONGS

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With Songs

BY

ROBERT LOVEMAN

WITH

A FOREWORD BY JOHN BURROUGHS



THE CORNHILL COMPANY
BOSTON

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no 1

TO
MR. AND MRS. MORTON E. JUDD
AND HUBERT
WITH AFFECTIONATE REGARD

FOREWORD

I can gladly stand sponsor for the poetic talent of Robert Loveman. He is a true poet of a rare order, and, though of Hungarian parentage, is a true American.

These poems suggested by the war strike the note we like to hear on this side of the world—the humanitarian, democratic note, and they strike it with vigor attuned to music.

“The kings are going, let them go!” Let every crowned head in Europe roll in the dust, and let the people elect their rulers, and there will be no more war.

Our author's previous work, especially the thin volume called “The Gates of Silence,” in which occurs that exquisite lyric, “April Rain,” and which any poet in the world might be proud to have written, stamp him as a poet of unusual merit. No other singer of our time has essayed deep-sea soundings into the problems of human destiny and done it with a plumet of four-line stanzas, with great ease and gayety of heart, as has Loveman in his “Gates of Silence.” Much of it as good as the best in Omar Khayyam.

In these war poems the martial note is never struck, but only the note of human sympathy and brotherhood. I am sure that is as his readers would have it.

JOHN BURROUGHS.

RIVERBY,
WEST PARK, N. Y.

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SONNETS *of* THE STRIFE

WITH SONGS

O SET THE NATIONS FREE

Lord God of Hosts from out whose hand
the stars are flung afar,
Our orb is rent with discontent and torn
with savage war;

Come forth in mighty majesty and set the
nations free,
Who grapple to a dismal end in frantic
ecstasy.

The wreckage of a thousand ships are
strewn about the seas,
The bombs of death pollute the breath of
every fragrant breeze;

Lord God thy planet that was fair is gory
deep in grime,
Our age is one vast blotch of blood upon
the page of time;

Hast thou no potent opiate where thy
pavilion swings,
To calm the lust of murder within the
hearts of kings?

Our joyous earth on tireless wing went
singing on its way,
The widow's wail, the orphan's cry now
darken all the day.

Come in thy glory, God, and bid the battle
sorrows cease,
Pour on the wounds of mangled earth the
healing oil of peace.

Lord God of Hosts who still hath been our
buckler and our shield,
To loving bonds of brotherhood let now the
nations yield.

BROTHERS

O brothers, we are children of the sons of
man,
Valiant, fearful, haughty, tearful, clinging
close to class or clan,
Split in sordid, narrow nations, caught in
creeds that bless or ban,
But brothers, we are brothers of the sons of
man.

O brothers, we are children of the sons of
man,
With step elate the millions march upon
the battle van;
They die like sheep in shambles (dear God,
send peace again),
O brothers, are we brothers of the sons of
men?

The fleets of air that journey fair, on joyous
mission bent,
Now fling their death darts flaming, from
the fiery firmament;
Where soft the ocean billows breathe, or
where the breakers swell,
Squat on their hips, the battleships, are
baying hounds of hell.

O brothers, 'tis the mothers who are
martyred at the guns,
Europa's soul is stricken with the slaughter
of her sons,
The great world heart is heavy (dear God,
send peace again),
And brothers still be brothers of the sons of
men.

THE DEAD SINGER

Here let the wood dove softly coo,
Here let the willow weep,
Here where the winds and waters woo,
The singer dreams in sleep.

The music of his magic lute
Aroused the world to song,
Now that the singer's lips are mute,
About his bier they throng.

He hears, he feels, in sleep he smiles,
Through dusk and dawning dim,
Adown the hushed forest aisles
They bring their songs to him.

COLUMBIA

COLUMBIA, though all the world doth
rage,

Thou art our rock of everlasting peace;

When the grim grapple of the Czars shall
cease

And Slav and Teuton stagger from the stage
Bespoiled sisters of a shamed age, —

Thy fields shall flower and thy bounds
increase

In hereditaments of loving lease;

Oh let thy holy purpose still engage
To be pacificator of all men,

Thy ports the haven of the meek and low,
Thy happy hearthstones ever radiant when
The children gather at the firelight glow;

COLUMBIA! rear thou each loyal son,
Of Lincoln's mould, and mighty Washington.

VENUS AT DAWN

Poor Venus, dying, faint, afar,
Dear paling, fading morning star,
In the gay east there flames a feast
Of fiery light engulfing night,
And you I deemed so lustrous fair
Have perished in the morning air;
Gulp'd down like any tiny mouse
That Wumpus finds about the house;
I came to see a sunrise rare,
With pomp and glory everywhere, —
But vanished Venus, just between us, —
That burly sun cannot bemean us;
Soft; — meet me ere the full blown morn,
We'll hold the blusterer in scorn;
I'll strew thy bier with longings gray,
When thou dost die into the day.

TO THE PRESIDENT

O Pilot of the great ship of our State,
Thy God sustain thee in this turbid day,
The wrangling elements beset thy way,
The waters of the world are rife with hate;

O Pilot, some vast purpose of wise fate
Hath set thee at the helm, and bids thee
 stay
Calm, brave, undaunted, until reason's ray
The wrack allay, the tempest dissipate;

O Pilot, thee thy children fond, revere,
Secure in their firm trust, thou canst ne'er
 fail
To weather ev'ry wind and warring gale
Until the harbor of sweet peace be near;

Guide thou the ship of State, majestic, free,
The banners at the mast are Love and Liberty.

SONG

Not in far lands agleam with snow or sun,
Doth paradisial joys exultant lie,
Lo, at thy feet the homely blisses run,
Above thee bends the fond, familiar sky.

Not in the orient or adown the west
Hope, happiness, and fruited peace are found,
At thy warm hearthstone dwell repose and
rest,
Thy fragrant garden is the hallowed ground.

WORLD WAR

The kings are going, there will be no kings
When compt shall come for all this bloody
day;

Out of the carnage and the sanguine fray
Are looming portents of compulsive things;

Vast are the tidings my Marconi brings,
The heirs of Hapsburg banisht in dismay,
The Romanovs are fleeing ashen gray,
The children starve, there are bread riotings,

The house of Hohenzollern is laid low,
The kings are going, let them swiftly go;

A stricken world in horror and despair
Sickens of hate and venomd mutterings,
Of court and clique, and damned intrigue
there,
The kings are going, there must be no kings.

SONG

Give all thou hast, go get thee more,
And still persist in giving;
Give gold, give love, give sympathy,
'Tis very bliss of living;
The flowers freely fragrance breathe,
The seas pour out their store,
Clouds rise and swell upon the skies,
To give, and give the more.

Give all thy mind, give all thy soul,
Give all thy teeming brain,
When thou hast parted with the whole,
The best doth yet remain;
Give all thy days, give all thy years,
Give all thy joy, give all thy tears,
All that thou hast, O mortal give,
This only is the way to live.

WHEN FROM HOARSE GUNS

When from hoarse guns the iron clamor dies,
And tatter'd nations shiver in dismay,
What will be said of this decadent day,
Besotted in its damn'd atrocities?

What must the cynic gods in startled skies
To all this futile, wild alarum say?
The Briton, Turk and Teuton fondly pray
Each for his arms, the winged victories;

Our orphaned age is smit with serried woe,
Art, music, science, lagging at the rear,
Pale pestilence about the field doth go,
Gaunt famine follows with a hungry leer;

O time! O day! O age! a thousand years
Cannot erase the heartache, blood and tears.

THE PLAY

The Play's the thing,
And Life's the play,
The curtain rises
With the day;
Morning is youth,
At noon, a rune of June,
Then manhood's
Mighty afternoon.

The Play's the thing,
Life is the Play,
Lascivious Autumn
Comes in gray,
Mauve, olive, ivory, —
Russet, brown, —
Old gray-beard,
Ring the curtain down.

THE RIVERS

The rivers of the war-lands in dismay
Are mournful watchers of distress and woe;
There tenderly the weeping Rhine doth flow
In sympathy upon her wand'ring way;
The tearful Thames arrayed in somber gray
Majestic murmurs requiems soft and low,
The while her sister Seine in grief doth go
Singing in rhythmic sorrow of the fray;
The Danube drinks her dark draught to the
 lees,
The Neva's breast doth surge with heavy
 tide,
O woeful hour! in bloody days as these
The savage race of man in shame should hide;
Poor troubled rivers whilst thy children die
How can sun, moon, or stars illume the sky?

POLAND

(1916)

There is a God in Israel,
He seemeth far away
From courts and kings and princes
Who govern us today;
There is a God in Israel,
But what can one God do
With all the frantic bedlam
Of all the crazy crew?

There is a God in Israel,
Sooner or late he comes,
A widowed, orphaned, ravisht peace
Follows the muffled drums;
Dear God who was in Israel,
Come visit us today, —
There is a God in Israel,
He seemeth far away.

INVOCATION

The Sheik-ul-Islam at the Serail Mosque
Prays Mahmud, grace unto the Ottoman;
His brother Teuton fervently doth ask
Herr Gott for habitation neath the sun;

To Le Bon Dieu, the Frenchman fondly cries,
That he may spurn the bold invader forth,
And Albion's sons assail the patient skies
With pleas to God, as much or little worth;

The Maharajas of the golden Ind,
Perturbed folk of ev'ry land and clime,
Send supplication over wave and wind; —
O deities bedazed! O parlous time!

Somewhere perchance, tender or savage
prayers
Are treasured by the gods with pitying tears.

SONG

I thank thee, God, that I was strong,
That life leap'd lusty in my blood,
For ev'ry thrush or linnet song,
For love and all our nestling brood.

I bless thee, God, that I am old,
And bent and poor, and weak and blind.
I drained the chalices of gold,
Firmly I face the leaden wind.

THE WORLD IS MAD

The world is mad, the nations are insane,
Stark bedlam reigns o'er half the frantic
earth,

The womb of Time doth give prodigious birth
To monstrous deeds upon the land and main;

The frowning hosts of Mars have all the gain,
Our smiling arts of peace have little worth; —
Banisht the soft designs of joyous mirth,
Europa, frenzied, writhes in tragic pain!

COLUMBIA, be thou steadfast, patiently
With love and pity view the startling fray;
Saints, villains, heroes, all commingled be
In the death-grapple for world mastery;

Dear God, speed thou the most auspicious
day
When Might shall lay his boastful power away.

THE PLAY

The throngs that jostle in the street,
Are people in a play,
The tragic and the humorous,
The grievous and the gay;
Youth and doddering dotard,
Moonlight, storm or sun,
Ring up the magic curtain,
The play has just begun.

Sweet melodies insistent
Pervade the *mise en scène*,
Sunshine clothed in shadow,
Snow white or willow green;
Heroes, clowns and villain,
Dusk drowns the weary sun, —
Ring down the twilight curtain,
The play of life is done.

WHAT WILL EVOLVE?

What will evolve from out this hellish strife,
The loot, the pillage, and the mad rapine?
Some final good, some lofty goal serene,
Must be for all who here inherit life.

What world-wide sunlit revolution rife
Of liberty and love doth lurk unseen?
The body-politic is foul, unclean,
The fester splutters to the surgeon's knife.

Perchance the peasant and the toiler low,
May rise to stature of enfranchised men,
Europa's humble millions soon may know
Fair freedom breaking over bog and fen.

If it be so, dear God, not all in vain,
The vast procession of the maimed and slain.

SONG

Leaf of the tree, wave of the sea,
Beam of the star, and breezes free,
Light of the morn, grace of the thorn,
How can the bosom feel forlorn?
The lush warm grass, and birds that pass,
Love of the lad, faith of the lass,
Over us all the sun's bright eye,
In the blue of the summer sky.

Bower, tower, flower and hour,
Dower of health, fame and power,
Charity, hope, and peace and rest,
Thrilling with joy the eager breast,
The day and night in happy flight,
The noon of June, a dream delight,
And life and death a joyous song,
For him who knows nor hate nor wrong.

TO HENRY FORD

When the grim war lords and their jealousies
Are buried with the muck and trash of time,
Thy dream that came immortal and sublime
Shall still illumine the blood-stained centuries;

The little men make mock of lofty deed,
The gun-men vend their iron chattel still,
One beam doth gleam while all the world doth
 bleed,
Thy light of love set on hope's highest hill;

Be undismayed, the dream shall yet avail,
Nations unborn will laud thy peaceful prayer,
The craft sent forth into the hateful gale
Will anchor in fame's harbor calm and fair;

O strive again, beyond the tumult's rage,
Hist'ry for thee shall keep her whitest page.

WILLOW SONG

Willow, willow, in the spring,
When my heart is hungering,
First of all thou then art seen
In a shimmering gown of green,
Then full soon that thou art found,
Thy garments trailing to the ground.
Do dryads deem thee, flowing there,
An emerald fountain in the air?
Ne'er a willow weeps for me,
Thou gracile, verdant ecstasy,
But in rapt beauty thou dost gleam,
O'er the meadow, by the stream;
Willow, willow, in the spring,
When my heart is hungering.

SONNET

Now that the eve is tranquil, calm, and still,
Now that the goal I sought in youth, finds
me,

Now that the benison of rock and tree,
The comrad'ry of valley and of hill
With a vast surge of sympathy doth thrill
My soul to overflow, and every sea
Murmurs again an olden melody, —
The dawn doth prophesy, and dusk fulfill;
Beach'd in the port of peace my heart doth
dwell,

War's tumult seems an eager infant's play,
I watch, I wait, my peaceful beads I tell,
While down the west recedes majestic day;
O Youth, O Love, O Age, the world is fair,
Host upon host of glories throng the air.

SPRING SONG

A balmy hint, then from the mint
Of April comes a flood
Of dandelion riches,
Making opulent the wood;
They cluster in a fluster —
How good the grasses feel!
The Cræsus Spring his gold doth fling,
The winter's hurt to heal.

The daffodils are redolent
With hope and happiness,
The jonquils beatific
In a becoming dress;
The mellow, yellow flowers
Make a fellow feel benign;
I owe no debt of vain regret —
Old Midas' store is mine.

SONNET

Great themes and deeds surge o'er me, I
stand lone

On Pisgah gazing to the promised land,
Or on the banisht, bleak, Helena strand,
Looking to seaward with Napoleon;

The airs of Egypt waft my galleon
Where Cleopatra lies by houris fanned,
Or at a statue's base I stricken stand
And find the mighty Cæsar, bleeding, prone;

A vast procession of immortal men
And gorgeous women come within my ken;
O Life, I cry, what art thou, where dost lead?
Where are these restless souls, and where
shall I

Quitting the hill-top and the pleasing mead,
Is it but death, — or life anew to die?

FOR WORSHIP ALL THE DAY

Every tree's a shrine to me,
Each rock a temple rare,
Each holy nook by hill or brook
Is dedicate to prayer;
Along go song with every hour,
And flower by the way,
Each sacred space is time and place
For worship all the day.

Every star doth gleam afar
On altar of the night;
The priestess moon in silver shoon
Doth bless each peaceful light;
Anon the dawn doth bloom again,
The east in glad array, —
Up valiant, happy heart and strong,
For worship all the day.

OUR DAYS

Our days are not for puny men or things,
For pigmy thought or idle prose or rhyme,
Blazoned upon the red shield of our time,
Behold the death throes of the grappling kings;

War's cauldrons hot with hated venomings,
Europa clad in bloody garb of grime,
Her sons steeped deep in filth, disease and
slime
Mid livid guns' tumultuous thunderings;

A creeping, crawling, cringing peace then
comes
Behind the bluster of the blatant drums;

There is no God of battle; Satan's throne
Is builded by the souls who cherish war,
Hell groans with music of the dying moan,
Its mad dominion all one hid'ous scar.

SONG

I'm weary with the war, I'll to my garden go,
And watch the blossoms and the buds ablow;

I'm sick of strife, I'll love the lilac more,
And gay wisteria shall adorn my door;

I'm neutral, let the foolish fight, who will,
For me wild flower flags wave on the hill;

I am a non-combatant and I see
Ahead of me a violet victory.

I'm weary of the war, peace I declare,
Of spoil and possession I demand no share.

Hark! Lo, a redbird in the green wood tree,
His song the pæan of delight for me.

SONG

Sing in the morning,
And sing in the night;
Sing away scorning,
And sing in delight;
Sing away sorrow,
And sing away slight,
Tomorrow, tomorrow,
Thy woes may laugh light.

Sing on, and sing ever,
Heart of my heart,
Shadow shall never
Grieve us apart;
Sing to me, cling to me,
Heart of my heart,
Sing 'til it bring to me
Love, and love's art.

WITH FORGIVING TEARS

When Zepp'lings have laid London waste,
then must
Berlin the beautiful as surely go;
Edith Cavell, sweet martyr saint, doth know
High Heaven is but for those who love and
trust;

Foremost among the phalanx of the just
Who for ideals strike heroic blow,
The bold Knight Casement doth immortal
show,
His proud soul rising from melodious dust;

Brave Fryatt follows, at the dawn of day
He mounts heroic to the stars away;

When frantic man has spent his futile rage
Upon his brother, and the book of fears
Is closed, dear God, seal thou the page
Of sorrow with forgiving tears.

O MY BROTHERS!

O my brothers gaunt and grappling to the
death across the sea,

Every wave of ocean bears the woe and sorrow
unto me;

O my brothers is not life and all the sunlight
fair? —

O my brothers, blinded, bruised, broken
everywhere.

O my brothers of the old world across the
yearning sea,

The horror and the pity of the struggle comes
to me;

Hath not God unto us given earth to be a
garden fair? —

And the tribes of neighbor nations crying,
dying everywhere.

O my brothers, Turk or Teuton, Anglo-
Franco, Russ or Hun,

Children of the old earth mother, sired at the
morning sun;

Is there ne'er an end to strife and murder
darkening the air? —

With God's vast and kindly presence pleading
sweet peace everywhere.

AMERICA

The fairest land, the rarest land,
The land we love the best,
Is our own land that staunch doth stand
A tower in the west;
An ocean wide on either side,
The gulf beneath her feet,
The very name, AMERICA,
Doth make our pulses beat.

The sweetest land, the fleetest land,
The land where freedom dwells
Is our own land of mountains,
And clover covered dells;
One joyous, vast Republic,
God! how we cherish her,
The very name, AMERICA,
Doth make our bosoms stir.

AMERICA, AMERICA,
O may we die for thee,
Proclaiming unto all the earth
Our love of liberty;
AMERICA, AMERICA,
Our banner is unfurled,
Thy pæan of democracy
Shall ring about the world.

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